

The Task Force Commander's Role In Fire Support Planning

by Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Leiferman

One of the trends reinforced with the transition to brigade operations at the National Training Center is the inability to synchronize indirect fires and maneuver to achieve the effects desired from combined arms operations. *The task force commander is not getting timely, accurate indirect fires.* There have been a number of reasons identified, some of which are related to the training level of the field artillery battalion staffs and firing units. However, it has become more and more evident that part of the problem is the task

force commander's inability to understand his role in fire support planning as well as the role of the task force as an executor of the brigade scheme of fires during brigade operations.

This article attempts to explain what the task force should expect from brigade as the 'provider' of indirect fires and clarify the role of the task force and task force commander in fire support planning. Although some of what is contained in this article introduces new terminology and may be considered 'emerging' tactics, techniques and procedures, there is a basis for this methodology in *FM 6-71, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Fire Support for Combined Arms Commanders*. These observations are also based on lessons learned during the first six brigade-level rotations at the National Training Center. This article also offers a step-by-step approach to task force fire support planning.

Brigade's Role: The brigade plays a vital role in task force fire support planning and execution. With the exception of the task force mortars, the brigade is the 'provider' of indirect fires. Therefore, before we can accurately clarify the task force role in executing the brigade scheme of fires, it is necessary to quickly review brigade's role. The brigade develops a synchronized brigade scheme of maneuver and brigade concept of fires, translating that concept into a scheme of fires.

There is no clear doctrinal definition for either concept of fires or scheme of fires. For the purpose of this article, concept of fires, expressed in terms of task, purpose, method, and endstate, is the allocation of fire support assets to achieve a specific effect on an enemy formation with a visualized purpose and endstate to support the scheme of

maneuver. The scheme of fires is the detailed sequencing of fire support events that must occur in order to achieve the endstate articulated in the concept of fires.

The brigade concept usually assigns fire support tasks to subordinates. As part of the concept, it is brigade's responsibility to provide indirect fires to the task force close/direct firefight. These fires are for a specific period of time and a specific purpose. The brigade must clearly specify when fires will transition to the task force and when the task force will lose them. Refinements to the brigade scheme of fires from subordinate units must also be integrated. Finally, the brigade integrates the movement of artillery units with the scheme of maneuver.

Brigade Role in Fire Support Planning

- Synchronize the brigade concept of fires with brigade maneuver
- Develop brigade scheme of fires and assign tasks to subordinates
- Provide indirect fires for task force close/direct firefight (specified period of time and purpose - clearly defining when fires transition to the TF close/direct firefight and when the task force will lose fires)
- Integrate refinements from subordinates
- Integrate movement of artillery units with scheme of maneuver

The Task Force Role: The task force is the 'executor' of their portion of the brigade scheme of fires. With the exception of the task force mortars, the brigade commander 'owns' the indirect fire assets. The artillery is normally in

"Army forces prefer to fight as a combined arms team... producing effects that are greater than the sum of the individual parts. The combined arms team strives to conduct fully integrated operations in the dimensions of time, space, purpose and resources.... The goal is to confuse, demoralize and destroy the enemy with the coordinated impact of combat power.... The sudden and devastating impact of combined arms paralyzes the enemy's response, leaving him ripe for defeat.... The application of combined arms in this manner is complex and demanding. It requires detailed planning and violent execution by highly trained soldiers and units who have been thoroughly trained."

FM 100-5

direct support (DS) of the brigade. Therefore, the task force must clearly understand not only the brigade concept of fires, and how it is synchronized to support brigade maneuver, but the task force's role in the brigade scheme of fires so that the task force can execute its portion. Understanding this, the task force must develop its own concept of fires. This concept normally involves assigned tasks from the brigade scheme of fires along with targets to support the task force close/direct firefight. This may require only the refinement of a brigade target or may require the task force to submit new targets to support the task force commander's scheme of maneuver. Additionally, the task force must plan to synchronize mortar fires with the scheme of maneuver, integrate the mortars into the scheme of fires, and synchronize their movement with the scheme of maneuver. The task force then develops a scheme of fire that supports those tasks assigned by brigade and the targets developed by the task force. It then issues the fire support plan to its subordinates. Bottom-up refinement to support the company/team commander's scheme of maneuver will also be incorporated. The task force forwards a concept of fires and target refinements to brigade as soon as possible to ensure it is fully integrated with, and does not desynchronize, the brigade scheme of fires. Finally, the plan must be rehearsed to ensure it is clearly understood. This process is the essence of the step-by-step approach that will be discussed in more detail later.

Task Force Role in Fire Support Planning

- Understand the integration of brigade maneuver and fires
- Understand task force role in brigade scheme of fires/maneuver
- Act as 'executor' of their portion of brigade scheme of fires
- Develop task force concept and scheme of fires
- Integrate/refine brigade targets for close/direct fire fight
- Plan for the synchronization of TF mortars with the scheme of fires and their movement with the scheme of maneuver

- Bottom-up refinement from company/teams
- Forward TF concept of fires and target refinements to brigade
- Rehearsals

Task Force Commander's Role:

Much of the following relates directly to work being done at the National Training Center on the abbreviated planning process. One lesson we have learned with brigade operations is that time for planning at the task force level is very limited. A task force cannot plan to have sufficient time for the deliberate planning process. This is equally true for planning indirect fires.

"Synchronization is arranging activities in time and space to mass at the decisive point.... Synchronization thus takes place first in the minds of commanders and then in the actual planning and coordination of movement, fires and support activities."

FM 100-5

The key role of the task force commander in indirect fire planning is **synchronization** of indirect fires with the scheme of maneuver. Fires and maneuver must be considered together. Commanders must first decide *precisely* what they want their fires to accomplish. If the commander thinks maneuver first, and then tries to add fires later, he will have difficulty.

Once he has decided what he wants fires to accomplish, the commander must take an active role in developing the task force Concept of Fire Support. He must clearly articulate to his staff, not just his fire support officer, the **'sequenced' critical fire support tasks** in terms of the desired effects for each target; the purpose of each target as it relates to the scheme of maneuver; the method he would like to use to achieve the desired effects; and the endstate he wants for each target. This will be explained in more detail later.

TF Commander's Role in Fire Support Planning

- Synchronization of indirect fires with maneuver
- Clearly articulate the task force concept of fires
- Articulate for each target the 'sequenced'
 - Task in terms of desired effects
 - Purpose for each target (as it relates to maneuver)
 - Method
 - Endstate
- Synchronization of mortars with concept of fires and the scheme of maneuver
- Ensure the brigade commander/staff understand the importance of task force fires to the scheme of maneuver

It is worth noting here that once the task force commander approves the scheme of fires, he must clearly articulate to the brigade commander and brigade staff the importance of those fires to the task force scheme of maneuver and the impact on mission success if those fires are not received. If a task force critical fire support task is not also included as a brigade critical fire support task, the likelihood of getting the target fired by artillery or CAS is greatly diminished.

Observations at the National Training Center indicate that many commanders are unable to clearly define what they want their fires to do, and cannot visualize their synchronization with maneuver. Of those that can, many cannot articulate their intent for fires to their staff. If they can, the level of training and experience of their staff and particularly their fire support officer is not sufficient to translate that guidance into a concept of fires. It is clear that, until time permits more deliberate planning, or until the staff and FSO become better trained, the task force commander must take a more active role in developing the concept of fires. He cannot afford to divorce himself from this process.

Now that we have discussed the role of the commander, as well as the role of the brigade and task force in fire support planning, what follows is *one* method of indirect fire planning at the task force level. Again, it is important

to note that this methodology is tied directly to the abbreviated planning process and the commander's role in abbreviated planning.

Step 1: Mission Analysis Brief: In order to make the right decision about the employment of his indirect fires, the commander must get certain information from his fire support officer. This is normally done during the Mission Analysis Brief. The key information he must receive includes a clear understanding of the brigade scheme of fires as those fires relate to the maneuver plan, a clear understanding of the task force role as an 'executor' of its portion of the brigade scheme of fires, and a clear picture of available indirect fire assets.

Step 2: Specify the Concept of Fire Support: (Note: One could argue that this step should be the 'Commander's Intent for Fire Support' as part of the commander's planning guidance to his staff. This is probably true above the task force level, where you have a planning staff and a FSCoord and can effectively plan and execute simultaneously. However, at the task force level you do not have a planning cell, and most FSOs do not have the experience of fire support planners at higher levels and are unable to translate commander's intent for fire support into an effective, synchronized concept of fires. Couple this with limited planning time, and the result is a requirement for the commander to specify the 'concept of fires' as the next step rather than simply provide his intent for fires. Time and training permitting, the 'commander's intent for fire support' could be the second step at the task force level.)

At the conclusion of the mission analysis brief to the task force commander, the commander gives his planning guidance to the staff. The commander *specifies* his maneuver course of action, assigning maneuver task and purpose to subordinate units. To ensure synchronization of indirect fires with maneuver, rather than giving only his intent for fires, he must *specify* his concept of fire support. He does this by clearly articulating his '**sequenced critical fire support tasks**'. There is no clear definition of a critical fire support task. However, from a maneuver commander's perspective, it is a fire support task that, if not properly executed,

Mission Analysis Brief (FSO Input)

- Brigade Scheme of Fires
 - Higher Commander's Concept of Fires
 - Allocation of FPFs/priority TGTs
 - Current and on order FSCMs
 - Specified and implied tasks
 - Limitations
 - Priority of fires
- FA Organization For Combat
 - Location
 - When in position
- Assets Available/When
 - FIST status
 - Mortar status/location
 - CAS allocation
 - COLT allocation/location
- Current Ammunition Status
 - Number of killing missions Available (FA/MTR)
 - Smoke (length/duration)
 - FASCAM (# of disrupt, fix, turn, block/release authority)
 - Number of Copperhead

will have a severe impact on the ability to accomplish the maneuver task it supports. It is imperative that the commander personally establish the task and purpose for each target. The FSO can assist the commander in establishing the method and endstate. Critical fire support tasks should be expressed in terms of...

The **Task** ...Although *FM 6-20-10, The Targeting Process* discusses task and purpose in terms of disrupt, limit, and delay, at the maneuver task force level it is more appropriate for the task force commander to state his tasks in terms of the effects he desires... *Suppress, Destroy, Obscure, Screen*. These effects should be related to a specific enemy **formation** and/or **function**.

The **Purpose** ...of the fires as they relate to the scheme of maneuver. This is how the commander synchronizes indirect fires with maneuver.

The **Method** ...to achieve the desired effects (FA, mortars, CAS). At this point, the commander may have a preference for delivery of indirect fires. He may specify that he wants to use his mortars; he may specify that his desire is to use artillery or CAS; he can leave developing the method to his FSO. However, with the exception of specifying mortars, he must 'negotiate' with brigade for artillery or CAS. The method may also be refined during the wargame.

The **Endstate** ...as it relates to the enemy or friendly formation/function. Endstate at the task force level is often the accomplishment of the task. However, a statement of the endstate is still desired and can be developed by the FSO.

and **Sequenced** ...to clearly prioritize the order the targets should be fired based on the scheme of maneuver. Commanders must ensure that artillery is available when required to support the scheme of maneuver. If the scheme of maneuver requires firing of more than one critical fire support task at a time, the commander may have to '**apportion**' his assets to meet all the needs. This 'apportionment' normally occurs at brigade level.

It may be worth noting here that not all critical fire support tasks have to be firing tasks. For example, the insertion of an observer to have eyes on a target may be so important that the commander specifies it as a *critical* fire support task. Another example may be the use of CAS or nonlethal EW fires.

Step 3: Wargame - Develop the Scheme of Fires: The sequenced critical fire support tasks specified by the commander are a key component of the wargame. Proper wargaming will enhance synchronization with maneuver. When time is limited, as it is for abbreviated planning, the commander should participate in wargaming with his staff. During the wargame, the commander and fire support officer may need to make minor adjustments to the concept of fires. What the wargame should accomplish is flushing out the **method** of achieving the desired effects — the scheme of fires. This scheme of fires must be 'nested' in the brigade scheme of fires, focused on a few key targets/critical fire support tasks, and link observers to firing tasks, firing units and an established schedule of fires. The wargame will refine the target locations, means of delivery, target triggers, observer locations, movement and

positioning for the mortars, CFZs, NFAs, and Fire Support Coordination Measures (FSCMs). The fire support officer produces two key products during the wargame, the target overlay and the fire support execution matrix. The target overlay is often incorporated with the maneuver overlay. The scheme of fires must be forwarded to brigade to ensure they incorporate the task force fires into the brigade concept. The fire support plan must also be disseminated to the task force.

Step 4: Rehearsals: Rehearsal of the fire support plan is the next critical event. The bottom line to all this planning is ensuring that it is clearly understood by those who must execute it (subordinate co/tms, observers, etc.) and those who must support with fires (brigade, firing units, mortars). The most important task force rehearsal is the combined arms maneuver rehearsal. *This rehearsal must integrate fully the fire support plan.* Task force personnel should also participate in the brigade fire support 'technical' rehearsal to ensure the task force targets are incorporated and synchronized in the brigade scheme of fires. Time permitting, the task force should also conduct a fire support rehearsal.

Step 5: Refinement: A plan is just that — a plan. As new information is gained on the enemy, the fire support plan must be updated. The staff must ensure that changes are coordinated and disseminated. It is also a proven technique to establish a 'target cut-off time.' This is a time after which any change to the fire support plan requires approval by the commander responsible for the target. If a refined target location is determined after the target cut-off time, shoot a grid mission. The task and desired effects, purpose and endstate should not change.

Before concluding this paper, there are a few other important issues that impact on task force fire support planning and execution.

High Value Targets/High Payoff Targets: (High Value Target (HVT) - a target whose loss to the enemy can be expected to contribute to substantial degradation of an important battlefield function; High Payoff Target (HPT) - a target that, if successfully attacked, will contribute to the success of our plan.) At the task force level, there seems to be very little utility in identifying

"How To" **Commander's Critical Fire Support Tasks**

Scenario: Your task force is the lead element in a brigade deliberate attack to destroy an MRB-size enemy. The enemy is defending with three MRCs abreast. You are the supporting effort. Your task is to breach the enemy northern MRC, which cannot be supported with direct fires from the two southern MRCs. Your purpose is to allow the trail task force to pass through the breach you create in the enemy position and complete the destruction of the two remaining MRCs.

Maneuver Course of Action: Because planning time is short, part of your commander's planning guidance to your staff, specifies a maneuver course of action that calls for a task force deliberate breach of the northern MRP. You assign maneuver task and purpose to subordinate units: two company/teams will suppress the two southern MRPs from support by fire positions to protect the breach and assault forces; one company/team will breach the enemy obstacles and northern MRP to allow the assault force to pass through the breach; and one company/team will pass through the breach and destroy the remainder of the northern MRC to allow the trail task force to pass through the breach and destroy the two southern MRCs.

Concept of Fires: To ensure synchronization of indirect fires with maneuver, you also *specify* your concept of fires. You develop three "*Sequenced*" *Critical Fire Support Tasks* (CFST) to support your scheme of maneuver.

CFST #1: First, I want to continuously suppress the northern MRC for approximately 12 minutes — the time I estimate it will take to occupy the two SBFs. The purpose is to allow both company/teams to occupy their support by fire positions without taking effective enemy direct fire. The method I prefer to use is FA fires on a group target by one battalion of artillery. The endstate is both co/tms in their SBFs without losses to enemy direct fire.

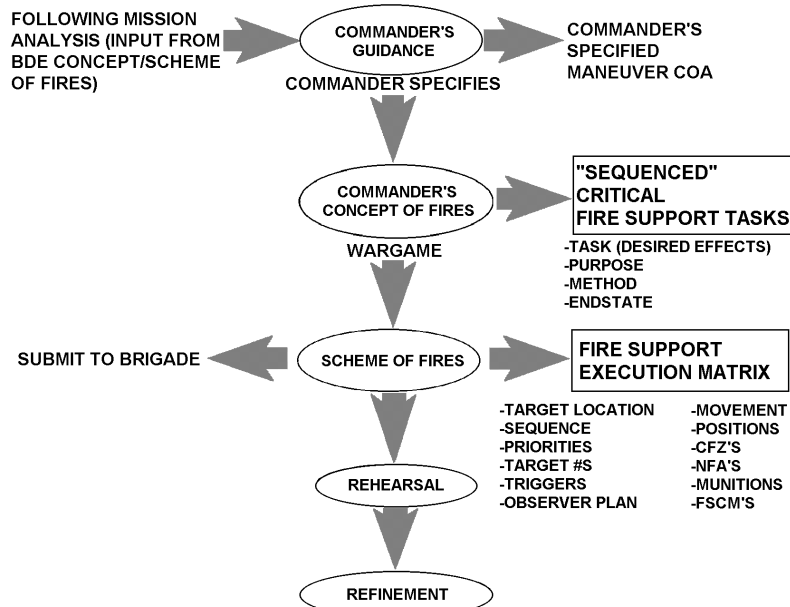
CFST #2: Next, I want to screen the point of penetration from the two southern MRPs of the northern MRC. The purpose is to prevent the enemy from engaging the breach force with direct fires until the breach is complete (approx. 30 minutes). I want to use our 20 minutes of mortar smoke initially — followed by generated smoke if wind conditions permit. This will free up FA fires for my last CFST. It is critical, however, that FA smoke be available if wind conditions are not blowing in our favor. The endstate is both southern MRPs unable to bring effective direct fires on the breach force until the breach is complete.

CFST #3: Finally, as the smoke builds, I want to shift FA fires and suppress the two southern MRPs of the northern MRC. The purpose of these fires is to allow the assault force to pass through the breach and build combat power on the far side without taking effective direct fire from the two southern enemy platoons. Again, the method I prefer is FA fires on a group target by one battalion of artillery. We should need the suppressive fires for approximately 30 minutes. The endstate has the assault force through the breach and postured on the far side to complete the destruction of the remainder of the MRC.

HVTs or HPTs. Normally, they are designated by the brigade commander and incorporated into his concept and scheme of fires. The issue with HVTs and HPTs is their synchronization with the 'sequenced' critical fire support tasks. Oftentimes, at the exact point in the battle when the commander wants a critical fire support task fired to support his scheme of maneuver, someone calls an HVT/HPT, and because so designated, the guns shift off the target in

order to fire somewhere else. If the commander is going to designate and fire at HPTs and HVTs, they have to be carefully synchronized with critical fire support tasks, and all observers must clearly understand that the target may only be an HVT/HPT during a specified time or phase in the battle. For example, AT-5s may be a HPT, but when the first echelon battalion is in your face, the payoff is less than if the AT-5s are identified and destroyed earlier.

FIRE SUPPORT PLANNING METHODOLOGY



HPTs are only high in payoff relative to the time they are identified during the fight. HVTs/HPTs must not undermine the sequenced critical fire support tasks.

Priority of Fires: (The organization and employment of fire support means according to the importance of the supported unit's mission.) Worthy of discussion is its relationship with the commander's sequenced fire support tasks. If indirect fires are properly synchronized with maneuver, and the commander has sequenced those critical fire support tasks to support maneuver, then it seems priority should go to firing those targets regardless of who has priority of fires. One could argue that, if the commander has developed a scheme of fires properly, then the right observer will have priority when the commander wants to fire the critical task. The key has to be every observer and leader understanding the concept of fires — the sequenced critical fire support tasks — and sticking to that concept. It is especially important for the various artillery FDC and fire control officers to understand this and not deviate from what the commander wants. However, priority of fires remains a valid concept that should allow anyone to receive fires as long as no critical fire support task is being fired.

Observer Planning: The issue at the task force level is who owns and posi-

tions the FISTs, the task force or company/team commander. The company/team commander needs them to assist in his fire support planning and to trigger targets assigned to him from the task force scheme of fires. The task force commander wants to position them to ensure they are in the proper positions to call the targets he wants. Observations at the National Training Center offer this — **the amount of certainty or uncertainty will dictate the level of control of the FISTs.** In a movement to contact, the task force is more likely to leave control of the FIST with the company/team because the situation is unclear.

In the defense, where the targets are fully synchronized with the task force scheme, the task force is more likely to dictate where the observers are positioned. In a deliberate attack, the task force may take the observer away from the breach force company/team to provide redundancy at the point of penetration but leave the FISTs with the rest of the teams.

Close Air Support: Simply stated, CAS is another means of indirect fire support available to the brigade and task force. The commander, first understanding the capabilities and limitations of close air support, must synchronize it with the fire plan to support the scheme of maneuver. The capabilities

and limitations (windows for use/targets/observers) have some unique challenges that must be considered, but the commander must plan his CAS together with maneuver the same way as his other indirect fires. It is conceivable at the task force level that CAS may be allocated or a CAS target assigned from brigade as part of the scheme of fires. More likely, however, CAS will be 'handed-off' to the task force when brigade has no viable target. If this happens, the task force must have a plan that synchronizes it with maneuver and their concept and scheme of fires.

Conclusion

This paper is not designed to solve all the challenges of getting timely and accurate indirect fires at the task force level. Hopefully, it has addressed some of the issues that are encountered at the National Training Center and highlighted the emerging observations from brigade operations. The step-by-step approach to fire support planning is *one* way to approach the challenge of getting the effects of combined arms operations. Whatever method used, the key is **synchronization** with maneuver, **commander involvement** in planning and refinement, and well **rehearsed** plans **understood** by every observer, leader, and firing unit.

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